

This record is a partial extract of the original cable. The full text of the original cable is not available.

C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 02 KINSHASA 002055

SIPDIS

E.O. 12958: DECL: 12/31/2014

TAGS: KDEM PGOV CG

SUBJECT: MLC OFFICIAL DESCRIBES INTERNAL TENSIONS,
ELECTIONS STRATEGY

Classified By: Poloff Edward Bestic for Reasons 1.5 B and D

¶1. (C) SUMMARY: A top official from vice-president Jean-Pierre Bemba's MLC movement reported tensions between Bemba and his number two, Olivier Kamitatu, and described MLC efforts to court potential voters in eastern Congo. Rumors of strained relations between Bemba and Kamitatu are nothing new. Kamitatu may be thinking about a Presidency run, but we think it unlikely Kamitatu will jump ship now, but if and when he ever does, it would be a serious blow to the MLC.
END SUMMARY.

Grumbles in the MLC

¶2. (C) Thomas Luhaka, spokesman for Jean-Pierre Bemba's Congo Liberation Movement's (MLC) and leader of its parliamentary group, told poloff November 2 that relations between Bemba and Olivier Kamitatu are strained. (Note: The latter, MLC secretary-general since 1999 and National Assembly president

SIPDIS
since 2003, is one of the more widely-respected public figures in the DRC. End Note.) Kamitatu skipped a meeting of top MLC leaders on November 1, and told Luhaka he thinks Bemba is upset with Kamitatu over the "Ghonda affair." (Note: Antoine Ghonda, a long-time friend of Kamitatu, was the DRC's foreign minister until July 2004, when Bemba fired him for being more loyal to President Kabila than to Bemba. Ghonda took a job as one of Kabila's ambassadors-at-large a few weeks later. End Note.) Kamitatu also believes Bemba is targeting Kamitatu allies within the MLC such as former agriculture minister Justin Kangundu, who heads the party's structure in Bandundu province. Bemba and Kamitatu are likewise at odds over who should head the party's structure in Kinshasa province. Luhaka speculated that Kamitatu's father Cleophas Kamitatu is discouraging his son from breaking with Bemba by explaining that for now it makes better sense to remain "in the game" than outside it. (Note: The elder Kamitatu, a well-known politician in his own right, is a member of the unarmed political opposition but is generally regarded as aligned with the MLC. End Note.)

¶3. (C) Continuing in the same vein, Luhaka said that he himself is frustrated with Bemba because the MLC leader only respects those who are independently wealthy, such as public works minister Jose Endundo and planning minister Alexis Thambwe. Traditionally, there have been no real political parties in the DRC, only "fan clubs." Many within the MLC regard the party as little more than a Bemba fan club Luhaka said, and Bemba himself treats less well-off MLC members as if they are merely hired help. Bemba works very closely with Endundo on the electoral campaign, for example, but keeps Luhaka in the dark. One sore point within MLC ranks lately has been the issue of MLC politicians printing T-shirts with their own faces on them. Bemba recently ordered 40,000 bolts of cloth with his own face--and tolerated shirts with Endundo's face, but was angered when he heard Kamitatu and Luhaka wanted to do the same, and refused to listen to Luhaka's argument that others in the MLC needed to build their own base of support in order to be electable. Former president Mobutu deliberately sought to keep his lieutenants dependent on him personally, Luhaka commented, and Bemba appears to want to do the same.

¶4. (C) On a more personal level, although Bemba makes \$200,000 a month and has a small fleet of cars, he failed to honor his promise to help Luhaka buy a used vehicle for transport around town. Luhaka bought an \$8000 truck on credit, and after several months waiting for Bemba to come through, raided party funds to pay for it. Similarly, Luhaka is annoyed at having to vacate his centrally-located apartment by November 9, because Bemba will not pay to renew the lease. Instead, Luhaka may have to move to one of the outer neighborhoods such as Binza, which is "less secure." In short, Luhaka said, Bemba does not "take care of his troops."

Bemba's Elections Strategy

¶5. (C) Commenting on elections strategy, Luhaka said that in rural areas where the population is less educated and informed, ethnicity will be a key factor and candidates will

need to sway local "decision-influencers" such as traditional chiefs. In urban areas, candidates can make a more direct appeal to voters, who are willing to judge candidates more on the issues. This is the case in Bukavu, for example, where Gen. Mbuza Mabe (from Equateur) has managed to become popular, and whose citizens already appreciate the fact that Bemba sent MLC troops to the region. Another part of MLC strategy in the east is to court potential supporters by addressing specific complaints (e.g. lifting the state monopoly on insurance providers to allow "SCAR," an eastern-based company, to compete) and promising to repair basic infrastructure in the area. While some in the Congolese Rally for Democracy (RCD) were upset at Bemba's politicking in the Kivus, "many" in the RCD have given up on the idea of winning anything through elections and are telling their colleagues to support the MLC. Luhaka confirmed that Bemba met with North Kivu governor Eugene Serufuli who, in contrast to RCD leader Azarias Ruberwa, has made a serious effort to connect with the local population there. As for opposition figure Etienne Tshisekedi, leader of the Union for Democracy and Social Progress (UDPS) party, he is popular in Kinshasa and in the Kasais but, noted Luhaka, but is less well-known among younger Congolese, has only a weak party machine these days, lacks finances, and is in questionable health.

Drafting a Constitution

16. (C) Asked about Senate efforts to draft a constitution, Luhaka said the current draft calls for a president who is directly elected but weak, coupled with an indirectly-elected prime minister. Bemba wants a strong, directly-elected president, whereas Kamitatu favors an indirectly-elected president. As for the merits of a federal versus unitary system of government, Luhaka said there has been no real debate yet, but added that people in the east, especially businessmen, want to maintain the autonomy they gained under the RCD. Under that regime, forty percent of all revenues collected by the authorities was "remitted" to the provinces. No one in the area wants to return to war, but easterners see the central government as nothing more than a predator, and will want to maintain their autonomy.

COMMENT

17. (C) The MLC has long stood out in Congolese politics for its relative cohesion and the acumen of its leaders, especially Kamitatu. Rumors of Bemba-Kamitatu tensions (stemming from Bemba's jealousy of Kamitatu's talent and prestige) are nothing new, but it is unusual for a highly visible Bemba loyalist such as Luhaka to speak of them and express his own frustrations. Luhaka may simply have been "fishing" in an attempt to gauge USG support or lack thereof for Bemba. Kamitatu may well be weighing the prospects for his own at the Presidency. Not coincidentally, his expressed preference for "indirect" election of the President could play well for him, given his current role as National Assembly President. We think it unlikely Kamitatu will jump ship however, but if and when he ever does, it would be a serious blow to the MLC. END COMMENT.
MEECE